



VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

1. WELCOME

Firstly we would like to welcome you to the volunteer program at La Maison d'Arnaud. By working with us you are not only helping us and the children we are committed to protecting but we also hope you will gain some valuable experiences which will stay with you all your life.

The Arnaud Guesry Foundation is registered both in an EU country and in Madagascar, as such you will be benefiting from the knowledge and experience of our staff and supporters as well as a legitimate source of reference for the future.

We want to tailor each volunteer experience to your own goals and aspirations and as such please let us know if you are keen to specialise in a certain area (certain age-group, activity or even administration experience).

We know that for some the trip to Madagascar can be daunting and you will probably have spent a long time planning and travelling to get to us. We want to thank you for your efforts in advance and assure you that once you arrive with us we will do everything in our power to make the transition as easy as possible. Starting with picking you up at the airport at Diego Suarez and taking you home for an easy introduction to the centre, the kids, the staff and potentially the other volunteers.

This handbook is meant to provide you with an outline of life for a volunteer here at La Maison d'Arnaud but is by no means extensive. We recommend you buy a travel guide (Bradt is great, so is Lonely Planet) and ask us as many questions as you can before you arrive. Just to get you started however, here are some pointers...

2. LIFE AT LA MAISON D'ARNAUD

As a residential home for orphaned, abandoned and abused children if you have chosen a volunteer program that includes living on site then you will naturally also be living with our director and our kids. Depending on their age and background the children will speak mostly Malagasy, although they learn French at school. The staff all speak both languages confidently. The director speaks English and French and will help with translating where he can.

You will be sleeping in a dorm type room with basic necessities that will also house any other volunteers present during your stay, we expect you to keep

this room clean and tidy and a cleaner may come in once a week to help you with this. You will have access to the kitchen with a gas stove, water filter and fridge/freezer. You will also have access to showers and toilets with running (but not hot) water and electrical outlets (French two-pronged). These facilities are shared with the rest of the house and we ask you to be respectful of that. You will be expected to co-operate with other volunteers and participate in the work, cleaning and cooking rotas that are in place.

Security in Diego is relatively good but Madagascar is nonetheless a country suffering severe poverty. As a result it is never wise to flaunt money or expensive goods and we advise you think carefully about bringing valuable or irreplaceable items with you. We will outline safety guidelines for you at orientation and provide you with the telephone numbers of our security guards. We are always available for advice or help in an emergency but your safety and security is ultimately your own responsibility while you are here, so be careful and don't take risks. The centre will not be held responsible should something happen to you or your property while doing your placement with us.

Food is not a problem here in Diego and you will be provided with a hearty lunch with the rest of the staff at midday. You are responsible for your own breakfast and dinner and there are plenty of places to buy food. During orientation you will be taken to buy your first food shop at the market and supermarket and shown some of the safe and cheap places to eat. If there are several volunteers in the house at one time we recommend you share cooking duties to save on gas, mess and also money.

3. WORK

For the duration of your stay you will be expected to commit at least 25 hours per week or organised activity to the project. You will be expected to turn up to your commitments on time and carry them out to the best of your ability. We expect you to both help the permanent staff with the established routine as well as adding some activities to the routine yourself. We will help you get started your first few days but you will need to learn quickly to be independent and self motivated on site.

You should be free on weekend unless a special activity is taking place or you have agreed to help in a particular area. However, we do sometimes ask volunteers to make themselves available on weekends in an emergency situation (such as if a nanny is unwell or is needed urgently elsewhere). If you do end up working a weekend you can replace it with a free day midweek.

We do not have a big volunteer budget so you should be prepared to either maximise activities that need little or no additional resources (games, singing, movie night, going for walks etc) or provide the resources yourself through fundraising or donations (such as arts and crafts activity resources, sports equipment etc etc).

You might want to do some traveling while you are in Madagascar and that is fine. We prefer it if you organise this at the beginning or end of your stay so as not to break up your time with the children, especially if your stay is quite short (8 weeks or less). If you choose to take the holidays during your stay we ask you to run in past the management in advance and give us your travel information so we are aware of your plans. Any time you take off before or after volunteering is your own and is unlimited by us unless it involves extra work in relation to visas. However should you chose to take time off in the middle of your placement your time allowance is as follows:

4-12 weeks volunteering: 7 days off
3- 6 months volunteering: 14 days off
6-9 months volunteering: 21 days off
9-12 months volunteering: 30 days off

NB. If you choose to take time off during your stay rather than before or after we will be keeping your bed available and therefore you will still be charged for those days.

4. MONEY

The exchange rate in Madagascar is 3,500 Malagasy Ariary (MGA) to €1. There are plenty of banks and cash points where most foreign cards will let you withdraw money for a small fee- debit cards work best in this case but many credit cards are also serviced, check with your provider before coming. Most transactions take place in cash and many restaurants, shops and hotels only accept cash. You should have some cash ready in US dollars or Euros when you arrive to change at the airport. If you go to Antananarivo by taxi from Antananarivo airport it will cost approx. 45,000.00 MGA. Please note, if planning on bringing travellers cheques all the original transaction receipts are required here or the bank will not cash them.

Your payment to La Maison d'Arnaud, designed to cover your bed and board, depends on your length of stay and is charged as follows:

4-8 weeks volunteering: 15,000 MGA per day

8-12 weeks volunteering: 12,000 MGA per day

12+ weeks volunteering: 10,000 MGA per day

This should be paid in advance through bank transfer or in cash your first week of arrival. If you are staying for longer than 6 months it can be arranged in two separate payments, one at the beginning of your stay and one in the middle.

In addition to this you are advised to budget around 50,000 MGA per week for general living costs including your breakfasts and dinners. A Malagasy meal or rice, a topping and a drink will set you back around 5,000-8,000 MGA in a local restaurant. Restaurants catering to foreigners will run more round the

10,000-20,000 MGA per meal mark. Cooking at home is definitely the cheapest option at roughly 5,000 MGA per day or less for both breakfast and dinner. Taxis in the city are cheap and cost 500MGA per trip, busses run around the same price. A day trip to the beach will set you back around 30,000 MGA return trip in a taxi and around 4,000 MGA on the bus.

5. TICKETS AND VISAS

Depending on how long you stay you will also need to look into applying for your visa. You ALWAYS need to be able to show your confirmation of a booking for a return journey upon entry to Madagascar. If you don't know when exactly you want to leave then book a flexible ticket and you can change the date after you arrive, but you will NOT be allowed entry to the country with just a one-way ticket. Any stay less than 3 months can be done on a tourist visa, easily available from your local embassy OR from the airport upon arrival. However, anything more than 3 months will need a long-term visa. Because you are volunteering with us and we are a registered charity with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs you can go to your local Malagasy embassy to request a Courtesy Visa (or Visa Du Courtoisie) that will cover the length of your stay. Upon your first enquiry they will give you a list of documents you must provide to prove you are eligible for this visa- let us know if you need our charity registration certificate or a proof of employment letter from us as soon as possible.

6. HEALTH

Your health is very important and it is essential that you visit your local doctor and ask for advice about what vaccinations and Malaria medications you should get before coming here. We have a good consultant GP who works with us at La Maison d'Arnaud but medications are expensive here and so basic first aid supplies and any medications you take regularly should be brought with you from home.

You might also want to think about medical insurance (depending on how long you are here for and what you plan to do during your free time etc). We recommend enquiring about 'back-packers /gap-year insurance' or 'volunteer travel insurance' which is provided by some insurance companies.

7. CONTACTING HOME

There is WIFI at La Maison d'Arnaud, reception is erratic and in only parts of the house, but there are several good internet café's within walking distance which you can use for emails and so on. There are also several restaurants and hotels with free WIFI in their bars so of an evening you can take the spare office laptop with you to one of these establishments to connect there while you have a drink or something to eat. If you are here long term you can also buy a 'pay as you go' internet key which connects to your laptop wherever you are.

It is easy and cheap to get a Malagasy telephone number and it is one of the first things we recommend regardless of your length of stay. We would also recommend bringing an old phone from home (make sure it is not locked to one service provider) or buying a cheap phone here so as to avoid losing an expensive phone you may use at home. You can then make and receive international calls and text messages. This can be quite expensive but is a great way for family to be able to contact you at any time.

The postal service is not great and we would encourage you to avoid using it unnecessarily. Letters and post cards are fine, cheap to send and are more reliably received at

La Maison d'Arnaud,
La Fondation Arnaud Guesry,
Boite Postal 638 Antsiranana 201,
Antanamitarana Centre,
Madagascar.

Packages are a little riskier and you often have to pay to retrieve them from customs but are possible for those who will be here long term. We would NEVER recommend sending anything valuable, including cash, in the post.

8. GENERAL

It is important to have a little card with all our information on it (including address, website, email address and Rachid Ahamada, Executive director's, personal phone numbers 032 684 0179 and 034 289 6363) before you start your journey to Madagascar. You will need these details to fill in the disembarkation form on your flight. We recommend that you carry it on you during your stay in Madagascar so you will always have our contact in an emergency.

Please let us know when and how you plan on arriving in Antsiranana so we can be there to greet you and pick you up. We also need a copy of your international travel itinerary (for most of you that will mean flights both IN and OUT of Antananarivo) so please email a copy to lejmanchristina@hotmail.com and ali.rachidy@gmail.com as soon as you get them.

Useful Items to Bring

- Torch/flashlight and extra batteries
- Mobile phone (if yours has a lock, consider having it removed prior to arriving)
- Insect repellent, sunglasses, hat, daypack
- Sleeping bag
- At least one long-sleeve shirt or cardigan and trousers/jeans and pyjamas (it can get quite chilly in winter – July and August)
- Swimsuit

- Sunscreen (high SPF sunscreens are quite difficult to obtain here and expensive)
- Waterproof rain-coat
- A nice set of clothing for special events
- Madagascar travel guidebook
- Good hiking shoes and sandals
- Bank Card (Visa works best)
- Special medications and a detailed medical history
- Any special materials necessary for the work you are planning to do at the center (e.g. teaching aids, games, tools, colored paper)
- Malagasy phrasebook and other reading material (you can also photocopy the centre's phrasebook if you prefer).

9. Finally

We are *very* glad to have you here. We hope your time volunteering at La Maison d'Arnaud and in Madagascar is a rewarding and touching experience filled with love, humor, and amazement. We want to do everything possible to help you enjoy your stay so please contact us with any questions or problems you may have.